

Parent/Guardian Information Letter for Grades 4 to 12



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Dear Parent or Guardian,

Date: October 21, 2020

Schools are always working to make safe and inviting learning environments for students and staff. One way to measure the effectiveness of efforts is to ask students, staff, and parents/guardians to tell about their experiences with safety and about their perceptions of the school environment. As you may know, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) appointed an independent and specialized panel to lead the work on bullying prevention in the board. Two of the panel's independent advisors and experts, Dr. Tracy Vaillancourt, University of Ottawa, and Dr. Debra Pepler, York University, have developed a Safe Schools Survey that has been approved by HWDSB and the ethics committee from the University of Ottawa.

This survey asks questions about safety, bullying, relationships, and mattering (i.e., how much your child feels they matter to others) for students in Grades 4 to 12. There are two versions of this survey. One survey asks students about their experiences pre-COVID-19 (from September 2019 to March 2020) and the other one asks students about their current experiences (from September 2020 until now). Two survey versions were created in order to account for the unprecedented disruptions associated with COVID-19. Your child will be assigned randomly (by chance) to one of the two versions of the surveys during school hours. We estimate that it will take about 30 minutes to complete. Your child will also be asked some information questions such as their age and cultural background, but they will not provide their name so their answers will remain anonymous. Before your child is given the survey, their teacher will read out loud instructions about the survey, which includes information about their rights as participants, such as their right to skip questions and their right to not participate. An information letter will also be provided to your child along with a letter on how to access help if they need it. These information letters can be found at the following link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6PN9DDT>

The information that your child provides will be combined with that of other students and will be stored securely on the board's network and at the University of Ottawa. The findings will be used to produce reports for HWDSB schools that will help them to plan or revise their [Safe School initiatives](#). The findings will also be used for scientific publications (such as in journals and in conference presentations) to help other schools in Canada and around the world learn about when and where students feel safe at school and best practice strategies for helping to improve students' relationships with other students and staff. In these publications, no student or school will ever be identified—we are only interested in how all students, together, answered the questions in the survey.

Although no risks are anticipated for completing the survey, if your child feels uncomfortable answering any of the questions they can either skip the question or can stop entirely without giving a reason. They will then be asked to do some reading or a learning task until the class has finished the survey.

Should you have any concerns, if you would like to view the surveys, or if you do not wish your child to participate, please contact your school principal, teacher or another trusted staff member at the school. Your child's participation (yes or no) will have no impact on their activities, relationships, or learning opportunities. We fully respect your decision regarding your child's participation. If you do not want your child to participate or if your child doesn't want to participate, a fake (pretend) survey will be given to keep this decision private. The fake survey is formatted the same way as the real survey and asks nonthreatening questions like "How much do you like sports" and "How much do you like pizza". The responses to these questions will not be kept. In fact, they will be deleted as soon as the fake survey is completed.

If you have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity, University of Ottawa, Email: ethics@uottawa.ca.

Thank you very much for your continued interest in your school and for helping all of us to support a safe and respectful environment for learning.

Sincerely, Dr. Tracy Vaillancourt, University of Ottawa, Dr. Debra Pepler, York University, and the HWDSB